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No. 1. ONE PENNY.

MIDNIGHT JACK,

OR

THE ROAD-AGENT.

JACKSON'S NOVELS

JAMES JACKSON.

2 Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, London. E.C.

MIDNIGHT JACK!

CHAPTER I.

"LINCHPIN lost!—wheel off!—broke down!"

In a dark little valley, lying nearly midway between Fort Sully and Deadwood, and not far from the Cheyenne River, a gin trader, or smuggler, had met with an accident. He inaugurated a hunt for a piece of timber, which he hoped to transform into a drag to serve in lieu of the wheel.

Armed with an axe, Timon was not long in finding the desired stick, and when with the aid of straps and chains he had secured it to his satisfaction, the last streak of day left the valley, and the pale light of the stars took its place.

Then, with a self congratulatory pull at the demijohn, Timon hitched up the mules again, tossed the useless wood into the wagon, and sprung to his accustomed place.

The swearing, the cracks of the villainous whip over the heads of the patient beasts, and their desperate efforts to pull the vehicle, made up a scene never witnessed before by the hills that surrounded the little valley.

"Git ep! you stubborn Injun-coloured brutes!"

But Timon cursed, struck and pleaded in vain. The heavy drag obstructed progress, and though the faithful mules pulled with all their strength, they could not draw the wagon over ten feet at an effort.

"Thirty miles from a bushel of gold, an' bu'sted!" roared the smuggler in despair, springing from the box.

"Bless me, if I don't lighten the load! they do that when a ship's in trouble at sea, an' the ship Timon Moss jest now is in a fearful strait. Saltpeter an' soda! the thing is reasonable. I can fix up a story between hyar an' Deadwood. Fell in with Midnight Jack or the Sioux, either one will do, but the Midnight Jack story will look more likely."

Ten whisky-kegs, with a single exception full to the bung, formed the principal part of the load; then there were sundry boxes and packages, consigned to the citizens of Deadwood, among them the legs of a billiard-table, and the nucleus of a library which some "eastern chap" was going to start in the mining-town.

"Can't throw any of the licker overboard!" said the smuggler, with settled emphasis. "But thar's them confounded books—thar goes!" and

for the next ten minutes the lightening of the cargo went on: But the whisky was not touched, and the only articles that remained in the wagon beside it were consigned to the gamblers and other sporting men of Deadwood.

"Two hundred pounds lighter, my long-eared pards!" ejaculated Timon, over whose florid face the evidence of his exertion was pouring. "Now a last pull at my straw-coloured bird, an' then I'll say ho! for the sun-dance, or ho! for Deadwood. I can't make up my mind."

Old Tanglefoot's hands flew eagerly to the demijohn encased in a network of split willows, and he was in the act of lifting the often-touched nozzle to his lips, when a human voice made him start.

"I say, stranger, ain't ye losin' a right smart bit o' yer cargo?"

The demijohn almost dropped from Tanglefoot's hands, and he retreated from the boyish countenance which, full of health and good-humour, appeared at the rear end of the wagon.

The next moment, with his hand on the butt of his "navy," Timon Moss glided across the kegs toward the boy.

"Say, what's yer name?" he asked gruffly.

"I guess it's Gopher Gad, an' I'm not afraid of anybody in the Cheyenne country."

"Ain't, eh?" hissed Timon. "Wal, the reason is because you've never met old Tanglefoot before. Do ye ever go to Deadwood?"

"Been there once," answered the boy, who showed signs of retreating from the basilisk-eyes of the whisky-smuggler.

"Then, by the spirit of Bacchus, ye'll never go thar ag'in!"

The revolver full cocked, and tightly gripped by hands that had wielded it before, shot from its sheath, and the boy with a cry of fright disappeared in an instant.

"Can't git away that easy," grated Timon. "Blast my cargo! if you shall go to Deadwood an' spile the Midnight Jack story."

The whisky-smuggler leaped from the wagon as the last sentence fell from his lips.

His murderous eyes instantly caught sight of his intended prey, and, with a roar not unlike that of a jungle tiger, he darted forward.

But the next moment the western villain executed a sudden halt, for a loud cry came down from the shadows above.

"Cl'ar the track! I'm the Thunderbolt of the Dark-edged Cloud! a reg'lar skyscraper!"

Such were the words that halted old Tanglefoot, and, revolver in hand, he looked up, as if he expected to see the speaker leap upon him from the hills overhead.

Tall and handsome, affecting the dress of the Sicilian brigands, with a mass of dark hair falling to his shapely shoulders, this pest of the road was the most frequently-mentioned man in Dakota. He was still young, and the plundered agents whose lives he had spared said that he was nothing

more than a mere boy. Though never seen in Deadwood in brigand costume, his personal appearance was well known to every one. They knew that there was a grease spot on the left side of his sombrero-like hat—that he wore a cavalry-button on his right shoulder, and that a few links of a gold watch-chain hung from his black courser's bit.

About the time when the ungenerous linch-pin cast old Tanglefoot a wreck in the little valley, Midnight Jack rode upon the trail not many miles from the scene we have just left.

He had halted in an open part of the country, and the stars, as they glowed brilliantly in the heavens above, showed him the trail which he had made dangerous for some distance east and west.

With one of the huge revolvers cocked, in his right hand, Midnight Jack then kept his eyes fastened down the road, over which some kind of a vehicle was lumbering.

Louder and shriller resounded the whip, never for one moment at rest, and a puzzled expression of countenance settled on the road-agent's face as he rose in his heavy stirrups, eager to see the approaching team.

All at once a wild cachinnation, followed by a series of fiendish yells, drowned the reports of the whip, and the situation was instantly explained to the road-agent.

"Indians!" ejaculated Midnight Jack.

The wagon—for the noise told the keen senses of the road-agent that but one four-wheeled vehicle was approaching—continued to rattle over the not very smooth road, accompanied by real Indian yells.

A common wagon, to which four strong-limbed mules were harnessed, greeted the brigand's eyes. On each side of the hindmost beasts sat a half-naked Indian, whose hands griped articles entirely strange to them—whip and lines. Nor was this all. At least ten savages were crowded into the bed of the vehicle, dancing like fiends, and filling the air with those wild sounds which had so often assailed the ears of Midnight Jack.

Evidently they had imbibed liquor in no inconsiderable quantities, and they were pushing each other about in their drunken orgies, threatening to overturn the wagon, or frighten the mules, already ungovernable, into a runaway.

The wagon lumbering over the road had now reached a point almost directly abreast of the still unseen road-agent, and, as his hands shot up, a "navy" tightly clutched by each, his well-known "halt!" spoken in deep thunder-tones, fell upon the ears of the carousing Indians.

In an instant of time, as it seemed, the orgies were hushed, and the savage who had the lines, rising in the stirrups, jerked the lead mules upon their haunches, and prepared to leap to the ground.

But the quick eye and trigger of Midnight Jack, saw the action and suddenly checked it.

The stricken brave fell back upon the mule, shot through the eye, while his companion with the whip, kissed the road before the report of the first

dead shot had died away. Now ensued a scene of terrible and deadly confusion.

The pistols continued to pour their leaden messengers into the wagon, until the last red reveller pitched over the dash, and quivered in the agonies of death beneath the heels of the mules.

When he had reloaded the formidable weapons he rode up to the wagon, speaking kindly to the team as he passed by, and looked around upon the half-naked savages lying in the road.

"I kind o' piled them in the wagon, I guess," he murmured, approaching the vehicle, over whose side he leaned.

"By the gold of Ophir, a girl!" he cried, and with the exclamation ringing from his lips, Midnight Jack leaped from the saddle and landed in the wagon.

A moment sufficed to hurl the dead Indians to one side, and when the bandit rose from a stooping position, he held a female figure in his arms, and was looking into the whitest and loveliest face his eyes had ever beheld.

In the excitement of the moment, the bandit did not notice that the girl's ankles were bound together; he was gazing into the white, angelic face.

As he looked, his own face assumed a wild expression; the ruddy colour departing, left it as white as the one he held in his arms.

"Merciful heaven!" he cried, "I cannot be mistaken. If she is really dead, I'll exterminate the whole Sioux nation. I'll make their land a land of blood! Ah! Golden George will never carry out his threat now. Better dead, Dora, than HIS! But why did you come out here? Wake up! open your eyes, and tell me about father. Am I cursed yet? Are you dead in my arms? I'll leave the road now—leave it forever. The red devils shall curse the night they killed Midnight Jack's sister!"

As yet the girl exhibited no signs of life; the beautiful face, cold and marble-like, met his gaze with no return of expression, save that forbidding one of death. If the road-agent had laid his pistol-hand over the heart, he would have detected a faint movement which would cause his own to leap for joy.

But, in his anger and his thoughts of dark revenge, he never thought of this.

After awhile Midnight Jack crawled from the wagon with his beautiful burden, which he deposited gently upon a rich, soft plat of grass, that seemed to invite its sleeper.

Then he drew a piece of "keil" from his pocket, and wrote on one side of the vehicle these words:—

"Killed by Midnight Jack! This is but the beginning. Uncle Sam won't have to feed the Sioux much longer. Blood for blood!"

Midnight Jack was satisfied with this writing, and as he turned again to the little figure reposing on the grass, he said—

"I mean every word—every letter of that inscription!"

When he remounted his charger, which had watched its master with almost human interest, the body of Dora lay in his arms, and Midnight Jack rode from the scene of his exploit.

"Yes, she died before the evil days had time to fasten upon her. But what brought her away out here, anyhow? I'd give my very life to know!"

Talking in this and a like strain, the road-agent did not seem to note the progress of his horse, but he suddenly spoke to the animal, which came to a halt in a beautiful spot not far from the banks of the Cheyenne river.

"This is the place for you, Dora," said Midnight Jack, addressing the fair girl whom he had carried to this bewitching spot. "I'll visit your grave every day, and death shall be the portion of the fiend who ventures to despoil it. Now for the secret home. I saw it the other day, though it was well hidden. The boy has not come back yet, I think, for I saw him down near Brier Ford at sundown, and he had no horse either. However, he's an innocent-looking cuss, I take it; perfectly harmless!"

A few moments later, Midnight Jack leaped to the ground at the foot of a rugged hill covered with a dense undergrowth, and apparently inaccessible. But his keen eyes descried a path which seemed to lead to the top, and up this he sprung.

A few bounds brought him to a strong door, fixed seemingly in the hill, and adroitly concealed by a variety of wild grape-vines which hung from above.

Midnight Jack entered the hole in the ground and struck a lucifer, which for several moments illumined the place, showing him that it was the dwelling of a human being, for several rude articles of furniture lay around, as well as a lot of new skins, a pickaxe and a spade.

As Midnight Jack, with spade and pick on his shoulder, emerged from the place, he uttered a cry which was an oath.

"Thunder and rifles!" he ejaculated, and as the digging implements glided from his hands, he drew his repeating rifle. "The red devils are going to give me more exercise. Well, they shall find that I am eager to keep up the work I began to-night."

Another shaft cut short the sentence, and the road-agent saw that it sped upward from the depths of the little valley, and just beyond his horse which, with head erect, had snuffed the prowling foe.

"Not dead yet, you dogs!" he cried, recovering just as his horse sunk to the earth bullet-stricken.

"Lie still, Quito! It's life and death with us now," he said to the horse as he dropped beside him. "I'm hit and so are you, but the bullet that is to kill Midnight Jack isn't carried by the red-livered dogs over there."

"They shall not get you, Dora. By the gold of Ophir—"

He suddenly stopped, and a startled look filled his eyes.

"GONE!"

Midnight Jack sprung to his feet, and uttered the word in all the horror and despair imaginable.

"The red devils have stolen my dearest dead! Oh, you dogs! for this there shall be double vengeance taken."

He was answered from the further side of the valley. A line of fire leaped from the darkness, and bullets fell all around him.

The moon peeping over the edge of a cloud was revealing a score of horses, upon which dark figures were mounted.

Midnight Jack darted forward, and as he halted for a moment, his rifle sent ten messengers of death into the ranks of the savages.

Wild cries of pain and shrieks of death followed the rapid shots. There was retreating in hot haste; but before the redskins could get beyond the stretching moonlight, two rifles on the road-agent's left opened upon them.

With astonishment Midnight Jack turned upon his reinforcements, to hear these words in a loud, rough voice:—

"Don't let up, youngster, but give 'em all the grim death ye've got in the magazine. Whoop-ee! there they go! I'm the Screamin' Eagle of the Smoky Roost—the Thunderbolt of the Dark-edged Cloud—a reg'lar sky-scraper."

Instead of smiling, Midnight Jack's brow darkened at these words.

"I didn't want any help," he muttered. "By the gold of Ophir! I didn't need any."

The road agent found five dead braves on the spot where the Sioux band had fought, but no sign of his sister's pallid face greeted his keen vision.

"You may carry Dora to the North Pole, but even there the hand of Midnight Jack will fall upon you and tear her away!" he cried, looking toward the direction in which the Indians had fled. "I will not rest until I have avenged my sister!"

"Thet's bizness, stranger," came the unpolished voice from among the little trees that stood thickly on the sides of the hill. "I'm comin' down to take the hand of the feller what loaded a wagon with Injuns down the road. I'm a reg'lar sky-scraper! Hold on thar, stranger!"

A moment later two figures mounted on mules, whose bodies bore the marks of heavy harness, came in sight, and the road-agent soon caught their eye.

"Hyar we ar'!" cried a lank and uncouth, but strong specimen of humanity, springing from the animal's back, and alighting so near Midnight Jack that that worthy had to start back to avoid a collision. "I hevn't got a card, but my name is Rube Rattler, or the Screamin' Eagle of the Smoky Roost. Whoop-ee! strangers, we've checked five of 'em straight through to-night. This boy is—bless my boots! if I don't forgit what he

calls himself. I picked 'im up back thar a piece. Old Tanglefoot war goin to let moonlight into 'im, when I said, 'I guess not,' an' he didn't. He's a chicken, sir, an' I'm his friend from this night. The man what teches him teches the Thunderbolt of the Dark-edged Cloud. Say, did the Injuns take anything ?"

"Take anything ?" and Midnight Jack echoed the uncouth individual's words in tones so vengeful that Gopher Gid, who still sat astride one of old Tanglefoot's mules, started. "They took what Midnight Jack never took from any man—a sister."

"I've heerd of you,' Rattler said. "You never took a thing from me, Midnight Jack, and I'm always ready to help the man what's lost any of his own. Put it thar! an' let us be friends."

The stony expression on Midnight Jack's face relaxed, and the boy opened his eyes in wonder when he saw the two men shaking hands.

"We had a queer tussle to-night," the Sky-scraper said, glancing at Gopher Gid. "That old rot-gut peddler lost a linchpin. He tried to cuss it back, but it war the most wasted cussin' you ever heerd of. Then, as I said, he got at the boy thar who came up to help 'im ; but jist about that time the Thunderbolt of the Dark-edged Cloud dropped close by 'im. We emptied his cargo—knocked in the heads of his kegs—and left 'im with two of his mules. He war usin' the strongest kind o' language. It was amusin' to hear 'im. Did you ever meet Tanglefoot ?"

"He knows me, at any rate," was Jack's response.

"I'll go with you to the ends of the world arter the gal," said the borderman. "I've nothin' to keep me hyar ; no family. The boy—why he can stop hyar till we come back. Gopher, jump off the critter, and let Midnight Jack take the saddle."

"Not till I look to my own horse," interposed the road-scourge, before Gopher could spring from the beast. "He went down at the first fire, and I told him to lie still ;" and he went to the spot where his black horse still lay, but a glance at the rigid form and the glazed eye told him that he would never ride the faithful animal again.

With clenched lips, and eyes flashing anew, the bandit came back to the two spectators.

"I'll take the mule, boy," he said, gently, and Gopher Gid slid to the ground. "With a fresh trail ahead, we will overtake the reddies before they reach the big village. I have my doubts whether Tanglefoot was going to Deadwood. The great sun-dance of the Sioux is near at hand ; I guess he never misses such an affair as that."

The night was well advanced when Midnight Jack and his companion bade the unsatisfied boy farewell, and he stood in the darkness like a youth in a dream, listening to the canter of their mules.

Before departure, Midnight Jack had superintended the burial of his horse and the slain savages, so that their bodies would not taint the atmosphere so near the boy's hillside home.

"I'd like to see your sister, Midnight Jack, if she's alive," he mused, pausing in the low doorway before he shut the portal. "I haven't seen a white girl's face for a year, and I'll never see yours, Dora, I'm thinking. Dora—what's your name?—I'd like to see you. Midnight Jack's sister—that sounds funny."

The boy could not repress the low laugh that bubbled to his lips, and while it still sounded he shut the door.

"You will not find me here, Rube, when you come back," he said, speaking out his thoughts, as he discussed a frugal meal alone. "I'm goin' to hunt new trapping-grounds, so far away from here that I'll never think of Midnight Jack and his sister."

He finished the meal, and carried the light to his traps. Setting it on the ground he began to untangle the chains, but his fingers moved slower and slower, until at last his body fell gently to one side, and Gopher Gid, the little trapper, was asleep.

But it was the slumber of the cat, for all at once his eyes opened, and as they darted to the door his fingers clutched the butt of a pistol with firm determination.

Gopher Gid sprung erect, and fastened his eyes on the portal.

The candle was burning low at his feet, and the room was growing darker each succeeding moment, but the awakening noise at the door still continued.

Then came in sight the semblance of a human head, and the next moment Gopher Gid saw the hideous face of Timon Moss, whose two little eyes danced like dervishes in their cells.

He raised the revolver, and fired at the living target. At the same moment the candle went out, and left him in almost palpable gloom.

With the flash of Gopher Gid's revolver, old Tanglefoot's head disappeared as if a battering-ram had been applied to the cranium.

For a long time the little hermit stood in the gloom at the side of the door, waiting for a reappearance of his foe.

After waiting for two hours, with his heart beating audibly in his bosom, the boy began to think that his shot had disposed of his foe.

"He'll know better than to poke his head into a lighted room whose door is chained," he said, a victorious twinkle in his eyes. "If I didn't send the bullet into his head, I at least left my mark somewhere on his face. Why I never dreamed that he would follow my trail so soon. Midnight Jack is right—Timon Moss is a veritable demon."

If Gopher Gid had known that his words were falling upon the ears of the man he had mentioned, he would not have made preparations to inquire into the result of his nocturnal shot as soon as day broke.

Squatted like a toad, and with his repulsive face rendered doubly hideous by a long red streak across one cheek which bled profusely, Timon Moss sat behind some bushes which grew near the door of the cave home.

In one hand he held the ungainly but dread revolver which we have

already seen in his gripe. He peered through the bushes at the door, waiting patiently for his prey.

At last the door slowly opened, and the whisky-smuggler saw the anxious face of his boy enemy.

"I didn't kill him, that's certain," muttered the boy trapper. "Leastwise he is 't here to tell me this. Alas! Tanglefoot, that ball passed too near your face. It was a gentle reminder for you to keep your distance, and to knock when you come visiting."

Suddenly the tiger in wait crouched nearer to the earth, and then, with a roar not unlike that of the jungle-king, he sprung at his prey.

The twain went over together, the weight of the smuggler bearing his young victim to the ground.

They reeled down the hill together, over and over like amateur wrestlers, but the strength of Tanglefoot was bound to win.

The boy tried in vain to slip from the smuggler's embrace, but it was like the hug of the she bear, and the fumes of bad liquor almost overpowered him. As Gid went back the revolver was torn from his hand, nor could it be regained. Tanglefoot used no weapon, and when they reached the foot of the hill, Gid found himself lifted in mid-air, and held out at arm's length by the panting ogre.

For several moments Tanglefoot said nothing, but continued to gaze at his prize.

"Caught!" he cried. "Nobody whoever done Timon Moss a wrong ever got away in the end. It war fun to bust the whisky-kegs, but the laugh will be on the other side of the face afore the game is played cl'ar out. Say, whar's that j'inted individual who did most of the breaking, my delicate child?"

"I do not know where he is."

"Gone off, eh?"

"Yes."

"Alone? I heerd a great deal o' shootin' while I war coming hyar. Who did it."

"Midnight-Jack."

Gopher Gid peered eagerly into Tanglefoot's face to note the effect of his reply.

The whisky-smuggler started a little—that was all."

"Whar is he now?"

"I don't know."

Gopher Gid's answer seemed to nonpluss the avenger of the spilled spirits; he was at his finger's-end for another question.

All at once he broke forth with one that shot a malicious twinkle into his little eyes.

"Say, Gopher, did you ever see a sun-dance?"

The boy stared a moment, then said, "No."

"Heerd of them, eh?"

"I have."

"They're goin' to hev a big one up at Red Cloud's town," said old Tanglefoot. "Sixty hosses for the Injun what kin hang the longest. The red boys ar' comin' from the lodges of the Teton Sioux, an' thar'll be more Injuns thar then you kin count. Well, I'm goin' to the Injun show, an' I ain't goin' alone, either."

Timon Moss now proceeded to secure his captive, which no longer fought the tide which had set in against him.

"You will do me one favour?" said the boy.

"In course I will," was the answer. "What is it?"

"Shut my door, and fix it as I tell you."

"What! you don't expect to come back, I hope?" was the quick retort. "But I'll fix the shanty, fur thar may be some things thar that I'll want when I come back."

He then shut the door of the cave home, and left Gopher Gid there while he went round the hill, from whose further side he soon reappeared, leading two mules, the late lead ones of his team.

Gopher Gid once glanced over his shoulder at the hill-home which he was leaving forcibly after a long sojourn there, and could hardly realise his situation till he turned to look into the ogreish face of Timon Moss.

"Look well at your hole in the ground, my peewee, fur ye're never comin' back to its traps and skins."

Gid's eyes flashed fire.

Never? He would see about that.

CHAPTER II.

THE greater part of the week had elapsed since the occurrence of the scenes narrated in the previous chapter. Moss and his boy-captive had journeyed not fast, it is true, but nevertheless quite steadily, in a north-westerly direction.

"What do you think of the music?" asked the smuggler, when the boy had listened to the bedlamic din for several moments. "Not as good as an opery, but it strikes the Injun ear like the song of angels. Just over them hills are the red boys what whipped Custer last summer. It war the biggest fight we ever had in these parts. The blue-coats toed the scratch like men, an' it war a pity to shoot 'em down as we did."

Gopher Gid started as the little pronoun that told so much fell upon his ear.

"Were you there?" he asked.

"Yes, I war thar. What are YOU goin' to do about it, my peewee? Keep close to me, boy," he said, as, with a quick jerk of the rein, he brought Gopher Gid's mule close alongside. "Take everything in good-

humour. Ef the Injuns rile you a little, don't let on. They're not lookin' fur me on HOSSBACK!"

The young trapper knew the meaning of his captor's emphasis, and the real destination of the cargo of whisky which he helped to destroy was now cleared up.

Moss guided his charge to a part of the village from which the bedlam seemed to rise, and almost suddenly they emerged upon the great square, where more than one famous sun-dance and act of cruel torture had taken place.

In the centre of the square rose a pole about thirty feet in height, and from the top dangled innumerable buckskin ropes, the other ends of which lay on the ground, giving them an appearance of being nearly fifty feet in length.

Hundreds of Indians of both sexes swarmed about this pole, whose use we shall presently witness. Not a white face was to be seen, and the boy trapper instinctively drew back when he first looked upon the sight.

"We're the only white ski s hyar, onless—"

But Gid was not permitted to debate the mental question, for their presence was soon espied, and they found themselves surrounded by scores of Indians, clad in wild paraphernalia for the brutal rites about to commence.

Wild shouts of pleasure welcomed Timon Moss back to the Indian town. Tawny arms instantly caught his nether-limbs, and the overjoyed Indians would have jerked him from the saddle if he had not commanded them to desist. He shook the Indians off, and addressed them in a tone which caused the drums to cease beating.

He told them that the cargo of whisky intended for them had been seized by a lot of whites, and destroyed. In words that drew a smile to Gopher Gid's lips, he declared that he had fought to the bitter end, only to be overpowered after slaying some of the assailants; that he had escaped even while the noose was dangling over his head.

All this was received with shouts of triumph by the eager listeners, and when he turned his face upon Gid, the boy thought his time had come.

"I'm not goin' to give yer away," his lips whispered. "Ye wouldn't see the sun-dance ef I did."

Then he turned upon the Indians, and waved his hand toward the captive boy.

"The boy is Squattin' B'ar's!" he said. "His skin is white, but the Sioux will respect it because it is tied to the white chief's. The fire-water is gone, but it will soon flow in the big village. Whar's Red Cloud, Settin' Sun, an' the other chiefs?"

"Red Cloud has gone to the forts to talk to the blue-coats. Setting Sun is here. While our brother is away, the one thousand lodges of the Sioux are under Setting Sun," continued the chief, with the haughty dignity of a king. Squatting Bear and his little white have travelled long.

Let them seek food and rest. The dancing square is not yet ready for the sun-dance. For three days our people have fasted ; to-morrow the dance begins, and after that the great feast. Squatting Bear may eat, for he is our brother by adoption."

Tanglefoot turned to Gid.

"Come, boy," he said, "I've got a lodge hyar, an' we'll satisfy the inner man. To-morrow the fun begins."

The Indians at once perceived that the whisky-smuggler was on the point of leaving, and began to make way. Setting Sun stepped aside, and said in an undertone—

"If the boy is Squatting Bear's friend, why does he tie his legs to the mule ?"

These words, which fell upon Gopher Gid's ears, sent a thrill through every fibre, and the glance which the chief gave him made him for a moment wish to throw himself into the tawny arms, and find protection on the Sioux's breast.

But the next instant the crowd suddenly surged against the animal which the boy bestrode, and he felt the pressure of fingers on his thigh.

"So the old fellow caught you ?" whispered a thrilling voice at that immortal moment. "Keep up your courage ! we're all here—in the very jaws of death !"

We have said that the Sioux village contained about a thousand lodges. This is a fair estimate ; they were arranged in a rude circle, and faced the square, whose four corners were marked by the lodges of the principal chiefs, Red Cloud, Tiger Tail, Setting Sun, and Hungry Wolf.

Standing in one of the stoutly-built birchen habitations, with her face pressed against a crevice, through which came the light of the distant stars, and the hubbub without, was a young Indian girl.

She was clad in half-civilised garments ; her beautiful hair hung in wavy splendour down her back, and her feet, small and shapely, were encased in moccasins which had never been made for them—they fitted loosely, and in no graceful manner.

"Hush, Weeping Leaf !" said a voice so near the girl that she started back into the gloom of the lodge with a light cry of terror.

"Weeping Leaf !" she echoed ; "I am not an Indian. They dyed my skin while I was raving mad ; and to completely make me like them, red and barbarous, they have named me Weeping Leaf. Do I regret that I have come to such a fate ? No ! I came to this country on a good mission —to find my brother, cursed by a father, and driven from home to become a vagabond, they say, between Omaha and the coast. Father, who retired on half-pay, and proud of faithful service, is soon to go beyond the scene of his one great grief. I told him that I would bring Jack back for forgiveness ; but he groaned, and, hiding his face in his hands, cried that Jack was dead.

"But I know better," she continued, with trustful emphasis. "He is

not dead. I am here a captive, not only painted and dressed like an Indian girl, but called by an outlandish savage name. They shall not always keep me thus ; I will find that brother. I will pay the red fiends back for the attack they made on our wagon. They have warmed a viper in Dora Lightway—one whose aims are to find her banned brother, and to deal them blows of death. I did not know that that captor of mine was so near, and still I might have known that I would not be left unguarded. Ay, stars, look down and see that I am not an Indian, because my skin is red—look down and hear the vows of vengeance which well from my heart every minute of my captivity !"

As she uttered the last word she moved to the crevice again.

"Who blows that bugle ?" the girl asked, curiously, trying to catch sight of the blower ; but the next moment a dark figure rose between her and the stars.

It was the burly body of the guard, and his action told the girl that he had purposely obstructed her line of vision.

The next bugle blast was broken by the voice of the Indian, who stood against the lodge.

"Dog ! will you give your mouth no rest ?" said the guard, angrily.

Mouseskin's eyes flashed at this, and Feel-the-Sky advanced to bestow the threatened kick.

All at once, like a panther preparing for a spring, the noisy Sioux boy dropped to the ground, and the next moment threw himself heavily upon the guard.

Dora Lightway, the girl captive, heard the collision, and saw two figures writhing and struggling in the dim light.

Like two mastiffs contending for victory, the redskins fought just without the birchen lodge. The advantage was with the boy, whose sudden charge had taken his adversary at a disadvantage.

"Ah ! me, a groan ! the knife on one is at work," Dora said, with a shudder for the sounds that assailed her ears.

Then a strange silence came into the lodge.

The battle was over—but who had won ?

Perhaps both the combatants lay dead.

A half hour of mental torture passed away, and Dora put her hand through the crevice—it touched the rude bar which secured the door.

Holding her breath, she worked silently at this till it fell, and then she easily stepped out.

What a thrill of joy shot through the heart of Midnight Jack's young sister.

The stars were above her ; the lodge of captivity behind !

It was a moment the emotions of which cannot be described.

Near her lay the body of a man, and near to it another dark heap, but much smaller;

"They have both fallen !"

This is what Weeping Leaf said to herself.

The sounds before her told her that safety lay in the route that stretched in the opposite direction.

"Heaven guide my feet!" she fervently cried.

A shrill bugle blast at her very side almost lifted her from the ground.

With a cry of horror she turned and saw Mouseskin on his knees, blowing with all his might.

The sight decided the soldier's daughter.

"I am not free with that Indian here!"

The next moment she sprung upon the boy with the intention to do or die, and pushed him back.

At the same time she snatched the silver bugle from his lips, and struck him heavily with the singular weapon.

"Now I am free!" she cried, and still clinging to the bugle-horn, she turned from the scene, and ran beyond the cordon of wigwams.

The thought of escape lent new speed to her limbs, and she was just entering a line of cottonwoods, that stood like stately sentinels in the starlight, when a figure rose from the ground in her very path.

In an instant she saw the plumes of an Indian warrior, and halted with the famous horn drawn menacingly back.

But her right arm was caught before it could descend, and she saw a grotesque red face peering into hers.

"Go!" said a voice, and Dora was pushed on in no very gentle manner.

But the next words sent a thrill through every fibre of her frame.

"Only a poor, sneakin' Injun gal! I don't hev dealings with thet kind o' truck. I'm hyar arter a white 'un, an' I'll make the dogs open thar eyes afore to-morrow night. For I'm the Screamin' Eagle of the Smoky Roost! a reg'lar sky-scraper!"

Dora Lightway stood still like a person rooted to the ground with amazement.

She was afraid to breathe.

The man near her might be a friend.

"Who ar' ye look'n' at? Move yer boots, or the Screamin' Eagle—not Red Jingo of the Little Big-Horn—will accelerate yer pace!"

Weeping Leaf, or Dora, saw the figure step forward, as these words smote her ear.

"He cannot be my friend," she muttered. "To him let my skin be red and not white. He's a white man, despite his disguise—one of those renegades I have often read about."

Again the girl fled, and left the strange being alone in the path which she had lately traversed.

"I mustn't let my tongue slip any more," mused the man, thus left near the edge of the cottonwoods. "I must be a wolf, jest like the rest of the pack. I'm the Red Jingo; the Screamin' Eagle of the Smoky Roost is lost till I get out of this pickle. Ef I war huntin' red gals, what a nice

one I could hev picked up ; but I want to get the white 'un, the sister of that young devil, Midnight Jack."

"And we will get her !"

"Holy Moses !" exclaimed the speaker, starting from the apparition standing against the nearest as well as one of the largest trees. "War I talkin' aloud, Mid—no ! Runnin' Water ?"

"Slightly," was the reply, as the two Indian-like figures came together and grasped hands. "You were talking about a girl—did she pass here ?"

"Yes, an Indian crittur. Hev ye been to the tree ?"

"No !" was the low response.

Midnight Jack, or Running Water—as the Sioux now called him—felt that he was not far from his sister. He had tracked her captors to the confines of the Sioux town ; but as yet his keen eyes had not managed to discover her.

Happily, his past i tercourse with hunting-parties of the red nation had given him a speaking knowledge of their language, and his companion, who knew something of almost every tribe west of the Missouri, could, as he expressed it, speak the tongue "like er native."

It was now near midnight.

The drums had ceased to sound, and but few Indians remained in the square. The rest had sought their lodges, there to dream of the brutalities of the sun-dance, and to prepare their bodies for the endurance which many of the younger bucks had determined on in face of the assembled tribe.

"Hyar ar the ropes—strong enough to hold an ox up," whispered Rube, as he and the road-agent began to inspect the lofty torture-pole in the dim light of the stars.

"Ye've seen the sun-dance, Mid—cuss it all ! I mean Runnin' Water."

"I have not, strange to say, but—"

"I hev," was the interruption. "The red dogs run a knife through the thick muscles of the breast—right hyar—an' put in a good wooden skewer. To this they tie one of these ropes, an' then they dance about the pole, an' fall back with their full weight. It's terrible ! Sometimes the muscles give way soon ; but if they're extra tough they hold out five hours. It's a sickening sight.

"Did you ever try it, Rube ?" asked Jack.

"No ; but I'd like to try the dance once."

"You !"

"Yes, me ! the Screamin' Eagle of the Smoky Roost, alias the Red Jingo of the Little Big Horn."

Midnight Jack was silent for a moment.

"You'd better not, Rube. You'll have other use for your muscles before you get out of this devil land. Think of my sister—very near us now, no doubt. Leave the sun-dance alone ; let Indians mutilate themselves."

But the old borderer was not to be diverted by his companion's word. In his mind he had determined to attempt the sun-dance on the morrow, and become the only white man who had submitted to the horrible torture.

Silently the two adventurers glided from the square, and sought the lodge which Setting Sun had allotted to them as visitors.

As yet the death of Sweep-the-Sky had not been discovered, and Mouse-skin's trumpet was still mute.

Midnight Jack threw himself upon the scanty skins within the lodge, and soon fell asleep.

After awhile he was startled by a touch, which drew him into a sitting posture in the gloom of the hut.

"It's only me," said a well-known voice at his ear. "We've got to do one of two things—leave the Injun shanties now, or kill Tanglefoot to-morrow."

Midnight Jack was thoroughly awake.

"Go away without my sister? Never!" he cried. "We'll shoot Tanglefoot."

"Before the hull tribe?"

"Yes."

"But he's Squattin' B'ar!"

"He shall not betray us!" was the answer. "Does he suspect us, Rube?"

"Kinder so."

"Then not for certain?"

"He's makin' up his mind fast. I b'lieve he's been watchin' us."

At that moment a most unearthly yell rung through the village.

Our two friends sprung erect, and listened.

"What is it?" whispered Midnight Jack, whose voice was accompanied by the low clicking of the revolver which he held in his hand.

"A corpse hez been found," was Rube's quick reply. "I've heerd that yell afore."

The natural words, "If a murder has been committed, they may suspect us," struggled to the road-agent's lips.

Rube did not reply, but with lips firmly set, was apparently listening to the echoes of the weird cry that had shaken the still air of the summer's night.

But he felt the full force of his companion's utterance.

"Did you hear me, Rube?" asked Midnight Jack, impatiently.

"I heerd," was the answer, which was almost drowned by the lonely howling of some gaunt Indian dogs. "Thar's a good deal o' truth in what you said, but a 'stiff upper lip' is the motto. Thar goes the devil-cry ag'in! Gosh! it sends chills down a fellar's back."

The cry that had first assailed their ears was now repeated—and certainly divested of none of its repulsiveness.

"I'm goin' out," said the old borderman. "The Injuns are turnin' out, we must not stay hyar an' give 'em cause fur suspectin' us, even if murder has been done an' we are innercent."

A moment later the disguised whites stepped out into the moonlight, and into a scene of confusion utterly indescribable.

From everywhere the Sioux were issuing from the lodges, uttering cries which confirmed Rube's explanation of the first yell. Men, women, children and dogs composed the disordered rabble that rushed toward the dancing square.

The girl-hunters joined the savages, and soon learned the true cause of the hubbub.

A young Indian stood over the rigid body of a warrior of his tribe. He was gesticulating wildly as words fell rapidly from his lips.

"Feel-the-Sky hez been found dead—knifed to the heart," whispered Rube Rattler in an ear which he at first took to be Midnight Jack's, but the next moment, to his horror, he discovered that he had addressed a genuine Sioux warrior, who was staring amazedly into his face.

For a second that perilous error seemed to unnerve the borderer's heart, but his quick wit came to the rescue.

"The wrong ear, my brother," he said, in Sioux. "You are not Squatting Bear."

"Bear over there," was the reply, and the Indian pointed to the other side of the crowd formed about the corpse and its finder. "Feel-the-Sky is dead. There are bad knives in the village."

Rube nodded, and hastened to leave the dangerous locality, touching Midnight Jack's arm as he moved away, and without a word the twain slipped into another part of the awe-stricken group.

"White girl kill Feel-the-Sky and run off," whispered one;

"Not strong enough."

"White girl's quick as a cat sometimes. Catch Feel-the-Sky asleep, mebbe; find knife in the lodge. If she no kill Feel-the-Sky, who did?"

"Come! we go see."

Determined to set their doubts at rest, the red trio stole secretly from the crowd, crossed the square, and glided toward the scene of the tussle between Feel-the-Sky and his assassin.

"Stay hyar, or meet me in the lodge," whispered Rube, this time at the right ear. "Some young bucks are up to su'thin'."

He had caught enough of the young red's words to excite his curiosity, and leaving Midnight Jack in the crowd, glided off after the trio just mentioned.

Setting Sun had said that the startling death should be investigated in the morning, and before the beginning of the sun-dance.

Upon this the crowd began to disperse, watched with interest by Midnight Jack. The female portion especially came under his scrutiny, for he was always seeking one figure, dearer than all others on earth to him.

Suddenly a voice came from a dusky-faced group near, which chilled the life-current in the road-agent's heart.

"They're here—two of them," said that startling voice, not in the Sioux but the English tongue.

"Right in the camp, Golden George! I know 'em too; but Setting Sun an' the rest never dream of the facts."

"They're fools!"

"Who? Midnight Jack and the Eagle?"

"Yes. But what brought 'em hyar?"

"The same thing what brought me, I suspect—the prettiest face that ever left old Sully in a Conestoga."

"A white gal?"

"Yes; but come on. I'll tell the story as we walk. I'm tired; jest got in. I rode all day without stopping. Am I on the right trail? Is the girl in the camp?"

How eagerly Midnight Jack leaned forward to catch the answer that fell from the lips of the squatty man, over whose head towered a crest of feathers. But it was so incoherent that it tormented him.

"Am I never to find you, Dora?" he said. "Does another man hunt you for your pretty face? If so let him stand clear of Midnight Jack."

That the dumpy man was old Tanglefoot the road-agent was certain. His compa ion was straight and well built, and was attired as many Indians were, in a cavalry jacket and blue pantaloons.

The name Golden George was not unfamiliar to Midnight Jack. It told him that another foe had risen against him in the very heart of the Sioux camp.

He did not follow the train, but saw them disappear.

Thinking of his companion, he resolved to return to their lodge, and hastened from the uncomfortable spot.

The Indians on every side were rapidly seeking their wigwams again, full of the scene which they had just witnessed.

All at once Midnight Jack noticed a figure standing statue-like at the side of a lodge just ahead. The starlight fell full upon him, and the road-agent saw that his face was turned away.

"Now, Golden George, I'll turn the tables," said Midnight Jack, and the next moment, with the tread of the panther, he had glided over the well-trodden ground to the person's side.

The heavy "navy" was clutched in the road-agent's hand, and before the imperilled person was aware of his presence, the muzzle of the pistol was thrust against the back of his head.

"There's death at your brain, Golden George!" whispered Midnight Jack, as his left hand dropped on the startled man's shoulder, and prevented him from turning round. "One word of warning and I'll burst your brain-pan. You are a man of your word—so am I. Swear to leave this Indian town immediately—nor to interfere with me here—or by the

gold of Ophir, I'll kill you now where we stand! No cringing! Swear! or the bullet!"

The man attacked never turned his head, but his eyes flashed hate and murder, and he said through clenched teeth—

"Curse you, Midnight Jack—I swear!"

"Now go! Keep your word, Golden George!"

With the last word the revolver and hand were withdrawn, and Golden George moved off without a reply.

"I wasn't mistaken!" Midnight Jack murmured, looking after the retreating figure. "It's only a question of time. One of us will have to kill the other some day. Now, Tanglefoot, look out for number one."

Then he added, after a pause—

"The boy! I had almost forgotten him. I wonder if he understood my words? Tanglefoot intends to serve him like the wolf serves the fawn. When did that villain spare a captive?"

"Yes, when, Midnight Jack?"

The road-agent turned.

Rube Rattler stood before him, and the next instant the two frfends met again.

The fearless adventurers walked silently to their lodge and entered.

There, standing in the gloom, they talked in low whispers.

Rube had made an important discovery. The dead Indian had been Dora's captor; this he had learned by following the three young bucks from the square, but beyond this he had not been able to proceed far.

Every soul in an Indian town must be present at a sun-dance—captives and all?" said Midnight Jack. "So in all probability we shall have to go through it. But there is one who won't trouble us."

"Yes, I know him; he keeps his word inviolate. We have but Tanglefoot to deal with."

"He's the only one."

"And now I'd rather harbour the thought of facing twenty Sioux than him to-morrow."

"I'm not goin' to cross the river till I come to it," said Rube, with a smile, which his companion could not see.

A minute later the two friends had fallen back upon their scanty pallets, and soon nothing but the regular breathing of the sleepers was heard in the gloom.

They did not see the burly figure that crawled from the rear of their lodge, and some distance away rose erect like a man.

It walked hurriedly through one of the narrow Indian streets, and entered a commodious lodge, which bore a resemblance to the tepees of the chiefs.

"Boy!" said the man, in a low tone. "Gopher Gid, are ye still with me?"

"Yes," came a boyish voice from the darkest corner of the tepee.

"Good!"

"What was the commotion about?"

"Two Injuns fell afoul o' each other—that was all; and one got a knife in his heart," laughed the burly man. "You will see more than a sun-dance to-morrow, boy."

If Tanglefoot could have seen the expression that came to the little trapper's face as he uttered the last sentence, his snaky eyes would have shone with unwonted light.

"More than the sun-dance?" muttered the boy. "What can he mean?"

The first flush of dawn that stole up the valley found Red Cloud's village astir.

As Setting Sun had promised, the mystery surrounding Feel-the-Sky's death was first taken up; but the real detectives found themselves at fault from the first, and soon gave over the hunt.

The entire population of Red Cloud's town thronged about the square, in the centre of which the pole of torture stood.

Midnight Jack and Rube stood shoulder to shoulder not far from the spot where Tanglefoot and Gopher Gid, seated on Indian ponies, watched the scene.

The twain saw that the boy's feet were bound together under the belly of the little beast which he bestrode, and they noticed, too, that the animal's head was entirely bridleless.

"He's fixed Gopher to stay with him," whispered Midnight Jack, when an opportunity offered itself. "The little chap takes it coolly. He's getting interested in the proceedings. He has forgotten we are all here."

Then the speaker's eyes wandered through the savage crowds that were visible on every side.

But the only white face that greeted him was Gopher Gid's. Old Tanglefoot, the gin-smuggler, was arrayed in full Indian dress, one side of his face painted blue and striped with white, the other yellow and striped with black.

Such discolouring rendered his face perfectly hideous, and his expression was not softened by his ever-restless eyes.

The ceremony of the sun-dance opened at that moment when the god of day reached the meridian.

At a given signal six young bucks sprung into the open space and seized the ropes that dangled from the top of the pole.

Gopher Gid noticed that blood was streaming in profusion from knife-cuts on their backs and breasts.

Several were accompanied by friends or assistants, who assisted in passing the thongs into the gashes under the tough sinews, and out again, where they were knotted to the main ropes, so that they would not slip out.

For several hours this disgusting ceremony proceeded.

Gopher Gid took notice of everything that passed around him; he watched

the show of endurance in the ring until he turned his face away with a shudder.

At last a cry announced that one of the actors had broken through the flesh and fallen to the ground; there he lay like one dead, under the broiling heat of the sun. Another fainted from sheer exhaustion, and was released amid the plaudits of his friends, but the remaining four promised to eclipse Rain-in-the-Face's famous dance of four hours.

"Thar's my chance!" ejaculated Rube Rattler, as one of the self-torturers was borne from the scene of his terrible ordeal. "We've got to do suthin' to keep our reputation up. The dogs hev been eyein' us fur hours, sayin', 'Why don't you fellars show yer grit?' Keep an eye on Tanglefoot. Ef they'll let us alone, I'll beat Rain-in-the-Face's time all holler!"

Before Midnight Jack could restrain his companion he was bounding toward the pole, in his hand a bloody knife which, with a well-counterfeited Indian yell, he had drawn from beneath the old cavalry jacket that loosely fitted his lank body.

Wild applause greeted Rube when he was recognised by the Indians as one of the visiting Teton Sioux, and in the presence of all he thrust one of the bloody wooden skewers beneath the garment and made it fast there. His yells revived the fainting four hanging half dead from their torture ropes, and he frantically threw himself back as if in proud consciousness of his strong sinews.

Old Tanglefoot's eyes flashed when he recognised the new man at the sun-dance.

"Is the keg-breaker crazy?" he murmured. "Why, he needn't make a-showin' of his grit. Bless my blossoms if he'd do thet if he knowed thet Timon Moss was so near!"

On, on went that mad sun-dance, and the sun crept westward as if reluctantly. One by one the Indians of the first lot retired victorious from the horrible ring, and others took their places, but the Red Jingo still held out.

He entered upon his fifth hour amid the yells of the whole assemblage.

Midnight Jack looked on in utter amazement. Was the man mad? had he fainted? or was he dead?"

He longed to go forward and settle this mental conundrum, but the eyes of Squatting Bear admonished him to stand still.

More than once during that eventful day their not too friendly glances had met.

If Midnight Jack had doubted his discovery by the gin-trader, he no longer doubted.

"Thar's some shenanagan about that fellar's holdin' out," ejaculated Tanglefoot in a tone that roused Gopher Gid. "He's not hangin' fair. Did you ever take pertic'lar notice of him, boy?"

"Me? No!"

"Go an' look right into his face," was the unexpected reply. "Not an

Indian 'll tech you, fur ye're under Squattin' B'ar's pertection. Thar! I've cut the foot-cords. Go an' look at the skunk!"

Gopher Gid felt a thrill of joy shoot through his heart as the cords about his feet were severed, and he lightly sprung to the ground.

"White Fish is goin' to look at the braves," cried Tanglefoot, and a voice of approval replied from the chief's lips.

Gopher Gid did not hesitate, but crossed the space, and halted beside the Red Jingo, whose body, thrown back, was trying the strength of the buffalo-cords.

All at once the eyes opened, the lips unclosed, and these low words fell upon Gopher's ears;—

"Keep a stiff upper lip, boy! I'm the Screamin' Eagle of Smoky Roost—the Thunderbolt of the Dark-edged Cloud—a reg'lar sky-scraper!"

With a cry of astonishment Gopher Gid started back.

"He knows 'un!" ejaculated Timon Moss; "the time fur the fun to begin is hyar. Now I'll explode a bomb-shell in this durned Injun camp."

Midnight Jack, without apparently noticing his eager enemy, drew his revolver.

All at once Tanglefoot drew rein, and was turning the pony's head toward Midnight Jack, when a loud cry came from beyond the crowd on the east side of the square.

The peculiar intonation caused no little commotion; it startled the chiefs, and Setting Sun turned to that quarter and commanded the crowd to make way for the young Indian who was advancing at a quick gait, holding two glittering objects above his head.

An exclamation, heard by his nearest companions, fell from the road-agent's lips as the savage glided past and bounded into the square.

"My pistols! I must have hidden them in an Indian cache!"

Setting Sun, and the other head chiefs, uttered exclamations of wonder, as they advanced upon the Indian who had halted near Tanglefoot.

At once thrown into a state of great excitement, the crowd began to surge forward, but the voice of Tiger Tail drove them back.

"Where did Mouseskin find silver pistols?" demanded Setting Sun, as he jerked the ornamented weapons from the young Indian's hands.

"In the hollow of the tree where the chipmunk hides," was the response.

The four chiefs instantly came together, and Midnight Jack saw his pistols passed from one to another to elicit expressions of praise from the red lips, for they were silver-mounted and polished to a high degree.

"A name in the white man's talk!" suddenly cried Setting Sun, pointing to the inscription, "MIDNIGHT JACK," which was engraven on the barrel of each. "When did the white man hide his pretty pistols in the hollow tree? Ah! our white brother can tell us his name."

He turned to Tanglefoot as he spoke.

"I'll tell you whose they are," he said, as he took the weapon from Setting Sun's hand.

"Well do I know these shootin'-irons," and he held the weapons over his head.

Then Tanglefoot rose erect in the stirrups, and his right hand was suddenly extended till the dyed finger pointed straight at the form of Midnight Jack.

"Thar stands afore us the man who hid the pistols!" he cried. "He could not pull the wool over Tanglefoot's eyes. Come out an' face the music. An' thar hangs the other, playin' Injun, an' foolin' ye all!"

Tanglefoot's arm described a crescent, and the finger was now pointing at the Red Jingo hanging apparently lifeless from the torture-cord.

Midnight Jack had advanced a pace from his position.

There was now a flash in his eyes, which few who noticed it had never seen before.

"I am here!" he cried, in the Sioux tongue, "and YOU are THERE!"

The road-agent's right hand shot upward as he spoke the last sentence, and the final word was drowned by the loud report of his revolver.

The crack was followed by a loud cry; the uplifted silver-mounted pistol fell over the pony's head, and old Tanglefoot, with a headlong pitch, went to the ground.

Rube Rattler straightened in an instant, for he had witnessed the entire tragedy.

"Stand back!" said the road-agent, calmly, wheeling upon the yelling redskins, now surging forward. "What is that white-livered dog that he should live a chief among the Sioux with his hands reddened with our brother's blood? Let him be thrown to the buzzards that watch in the sky for the carrion. Will our brethren listen, or must Running Water, to defend the deed, which by Indian law he has righteously done, shoot them down, and then die himself, knife in hand, upon them?"

The road-agent's words, uttered in good Sioux, had a startling effect.

They stayed the excited crowd; the wild cries for blood grew still; and Setting Sun advanced toward the daring man.

"Go on!" cried the chief. "We will listen to our Teton brother."

"I have but little to say," was the response, the speaker's eyes dancing with delight at the triumph he had gained. "Squatting Bear came to our lodges long ago. He brought a cargo of fire-water among us. He lived with us till he married one of our women, but we would not call him chief. In the land of the Teto Sioux he began to steal; he treated his Indian wife badly, and one night he slew her in the little wigwam; not only that, but he slew a brother. The red wife was Running Water's sister. He swore revenge; he has trailed the white Sioux night and day—he and his brother, the Red Jingo. He has been found, and the fire-water chief lies dead before you. It is the law of the red-man that the nearest of kin must avenge. We have done that; in the camp of the southern Sioux we have

appeased our sister's spirit. What say Setting Sun and the chiefs? Has Running Water broken the laws that our fathers made long ago?"

"By the jumpin' jingo, what a speech!" ejaculated the Red Jingo, as Midnight Jack finished, and with folded arms, after the Indian fashion, waited for a reply.

He was the observed of all observers.

He stood erect in the hour of his victory, knowing that the lips which had almost denounced him to death were speechless.

Beyond a slight murmur of rough applause that had greeted his speech no sound followed it.

"Go on!' he cried to the four chiefs, who were looking undecided into each other's eyes.

"I say the same!" suddenly broke in a harsh voice, and Rube Rattler sprung back from the cord which he threw away. "We have tracked the white dog down, an' Runnin' Water has carried out the law of our people."

And to Gopher Gid, near whom his spring had landed him, he said, in a startling undertone—

"We've got the winnin' kerds, boy. I'm still the Screamin' Eagle of Smoky Roost!"

"The law of the Indians has not been broken," said Setting Sun at last. "Squatting Bear is not red. Red Cloud made him a chief; he got not his feathers on the war-path; he never hung in the sun-dance; his blood is not Sioux blood, it is thinner than the blood of our people. What say our people? Has our Teton brother broken the law?"

An imperious wave of the hand accompanied the Indian's question, and the wild yell that answered it told Midnight Jack that his terrible doings were approved.

He walked forward, and unflinchingly took the extended hands of the chiefs, and saw Gopher Gid staring at him with distended eyes.

"Shall the white dog lie on Sioux ground?" said one of the older chiefs, bestowing a look of disgust upon Tanglefoot's body.

"No!" thundered Setting Sun. "Let him be carried up among the trees, that the flesh-eaters of the sky shall not come to earth to devour him. To the trees with him! Where are our people?"

A few moments sufficed for some Indians to place Tanglefoot upon his pony, and, with a gleam of joy in his eyes, Gopher Gid saw him borne away.

The sun went down.

Its last rays saw the opening of the feast that follows the sun-dance; it was Midnight Jack that glided through the village, hunting for his sister Dora.

Suddenly a hand was laid on his arm, and he beheld Mouseskin standing at his side.

"Squatting Bear had friends; they are whispering together. They say

that the skin of our Teton brother is white, but they lie. They are mad! they swear to avenge the death of the white Sioux."

"Not out of the fire yet!" muttered the road-agent, and then he drew the boy aside.

"You are our brother?"

"Yes; the whispering Indians lie. Squatting Bear once kicked Mouseskin."

"You know all the lodges, Mouseskin?"

"All!"

"Where is the white girl that Feel-the-Sky brought to the wigwam?"

The Sioux boy started at the mention of his victim's name, and glanced around suspiciously.

Then he came up to Midnight Jack with a look of trust in his eyes.

"Will Running Water keep the words that Mouseskin gives him?" asked the boy.

"Running Water will keep them."

Then from the lips of the Sioux fell the story of his fight with Feel-the-Sky; his discomfiture by Dora followed.

Midnight Jack listened without a word until the boy finished.

"But the captive?"

"She it was who struck Mouseskin, and took his horn."

"Ah?"

The road-agent started back.

Could the boy have spoken truly? Was his young sister alone in the woods of Sioux-land, and liable to fall into the hands of Golden George?"

The thought roused Midnight Jack.

"Where is my brother?"

"Down at the dog-feast."

"And the white boy?"

Before Mouseskin could reply there came from the cottonwood forest the barking of Myriad Indian dogs.

"What means that, Mouseskin?" cried the road-agent, grasping the red boy's arm.

"The white boy!" exclaimed the little Sioux. "The red boys have taken him into the woods; they have tied him to a tree, and set the hungry dogs upon him."

The road-agent darted suddenly away, leaving Mouseskin bewildered in his tracks.

CHAPTER III.

"If I could steal back and get the drop on you, Midnight Jack! No! that would not be fair after my word. He forced it from me—curse my stupid ears that would not hear his steps! Why not go back—down into

the village and call him out? My word—ay, that's it. Golden George keeps that!"

A moment later the hillock was deserted.

"I will go away. To-morrow is the sun-dance. Tanglefoot will tear the mask off from Midnight Jack. I will wait for that event then Golden George will go back."

Not far from the hill the speaker came suddenly upon a lithe-limbed horse, secured by a leathern tether to a young cottonwood. The cord permitted the steed to pick at the sparse herbage that grew about the roots of the tree, and a light whinny greeted the Sport.

From among the low hanging limbs of the cottonwood the Sport drew a light saddle, which he speedily adjusted to the horse's back, and sprung into the leathern seat.

"I don't like this Indian guise," he said, vexatiously. "I'm not at home in it, and then Golden George is not obliged to wear it in Sioux land, anyway."

As Golden George rode from the spot where he had found his horse, he threw off the rough cavalry jacket which fitted his body, and drew a soft hat from his bosom; then a little water from the canteen that was hidden by one of the skirts of the saddle, removed the colouring from face and hands, and as he passed the belt of timber and emerged upon a little open country, lit up by the rising moon, he was Golden George, the Sport, not the mock Indian of the Sioux town.

"Hist!"

The horse stopped suddenly, and threw his slender ears erect.

"A horn, by my life!" ejaculated the Sport, a look of surprise in his eyes. "It sounds like a military bugle; but there are no troops in these parts. I'm near no Government station. They have wild stories about Deadwood, that the ghost of Custer's bugler haunts this Indian land; but that's all bosh—old women's twaddle. A horn it is—not a trumpet—there it goes again! Ghost or not, that trumpet belongs to some regiment."

Still puzzled, but determined to solve the mystery, the Sport galloped ahead again, crossed the valley, penetrated the timber, and saw the moonlight on the waves of the swift little river that rushed toward the broad bosom of the Missouri.

He turned his horse's head up the stream to whose ba..k he had ridden, and the animal was already obeying the pressure of the spurs, when Golden George suddenly drew rein.

Another moment and he was on the ground, holding in his hand a beautiful silver bugle on whose shining surface could be seen the inscription, "Seventh Cavalry, U. S. A." The mystified look in the Sport's eyes was complete.

"I'll blow a blast," he thought. "Maybe it will bring the ghost back."

Then a musical call, weird but beautiful, came from the mouth of the

historic bugle, and Golden George listened with a smile at the echoes that came back from the wood.

But another sound accompanied them. It made the Sport snatch the bugle from his own lips and turn about.

"Here!" came a voice from a spot not far away. "You are white, and to me you must be a friend. Heaven must have directed you to the trumpet. My weak hands could hold it no longer."

Golden George was advancing with rapid strides upon the as yet unseen speaker, and almost suddenly he came upon a girlish figure.

"I am a friend to the helpless," he said. "What! a girl, by my life! Heaven must have guided me hither."

The next moment they met, and Golden George took the outstretched hands of the suddenly-discovered one.

"Ah! your face is white!" cried the girl, with joy, as he bore her toward his horse waiting for him in the moonlight. "I blew with the faint hope that a friend would hear, and you came. Oh! many thanks for this deliverance. I am not to go back to the Indian lodges. I have a protector now. No! I am not an Indian girl. They dyed my skin—they—"

"I know you!" he interrupted, looking down upon her. "You are the little lady who stole the hearts of the young blue-coats at Fort Sully a few days ago."

"Mr. Antill—"

"They call me Golden George beyond the Missouri—I mean west of the river."

A cry of despair welled from Dora's heart.

With a powerful effort she started back, but Golden George pounced upon her like an eagle, and the next moment his eyes were flashing like a triumphant demon's above her.

But let us to another scene.

Gopher Gid, bewildered by the sudden termination of the sun-dance, found himself comparatively unnoticed. All eyes were directed upon Midnight Jack, now known to the boy.

"Back to yer lodge, boy!" said a voice at his ear. "Don't try to git away of your own accord. We'll be arter ye to-night."

Gopher did not look into the speaker's face; he recognised the voice of Rube Rattler, and, saying, "I will trust you," he glided away, and crept into the lodge which he had lately left as Timon Moss's prisoner.

The sun went down, the darkness came, and at last a slight noise drew Gopher to the curtains.

At that moment a dark figure sprung into the lodge, and the little trapper went down before it. He felt the naked arm of an Indian about him, and the next moment the wigwam was filled with an unseen, jabbering crowd.

Resistance was in vain; the boy was overpowered, and almost before he could recover his scattered thoughts, he found himself dragged uncere-

moniously through the street: The figures of his captors, as he saw them in the starlight, were those of boys of his own age. There were sixty or more, and their savage delight knew no bounds.

But Gopher Gid saw more than that during that enforced journey. For each boy there seemed at least two dogs. There were canines of all species, sizes and conditions—the mangy cur, the gaunt bull-hound, the deer-slayer. They resembled a pack of wolves, leaping over one another, snapping, snarling, and actually biting, all the time making night hideous with their yelps. Gopher Gid was hurried toward a fate which Indian ingenuity had devised.

On, on went the Indian torture-boys with their helpless victim. Two of the stoutest—real little athletes—griped the young trapper's arms, and at a rapid pace he was jerked over logs and rattled across the open space, until at last the torture-band came to a halt.

In the midst of the boy's conjectures as to the fate in store for him, he was jerked to his feet and lashed to the tree under whose wide-spreading branches he had been released.

Gopher Gid's arms were left free, but cords secured his legs to the stately cottonwood.

And the boy laughed grimly, and his eyes flashed with delight, as a long stick, green and stout, was thrust forward.

"Boy fight the dogs!" said the leader of the torturers in tolerable English. "If he kill 'em all Indians let 'im go, mebbe. White boy afeard to meet 'em?"

The crowd drew back, and the boy saw that the largest dogs were now held in leash with buffalo-cords, a reserve, probably, for the climax of the torture.

A semicircle was formed before the little trapper, and one of the scarlet imps suddenly picked up a cur and tossed him at the captive. But the quiet eyes of the trapper anticipated the dog's destination, and down came the club while he was yet in mid-air.

"Heaven help me!" cried the little trapper. "What can I do with fifty bloodthirsty Indian dogs?"

The reserve did not shrink from the combat, but sprung like famished wolves at the boy. The foremost received a blow that smashed his skull, and stretched him lifeless among his smaller companions.

Then blow after blow was dealt in rapid succession, the savages pressing up with their torches and urging on the dogs, which had entered with glee into the mad conflict.

It was a terrible battle, such as was never seen before in the heart of Sioux land. With bloodless lips firmly pressed together, and eyes flashing, but not with anticipated victory, Gopher Gid struggled against the mad dogs.

Up went that bloody cudgel for the last desperate struggle, out it did not descend.

Something seemed to have caught it among the branches of the tree.

Astonished, Gopher Gid looked up, and the sight that greeted his eyes caused him for the nonce to forget the army of dogs that were charging down upon him to finish the contest.

What did he see?

A naked arm thrust through the foliage from above, and his cudgel griped by a great white hand!

The stick slipped from his fingers, and hung suspended from that ghostly hand.

The dogs rushed upon him.

One wolfish animal sprang upon his breast, but he seized the brute by the throat, and flung him snarling and mad among his companions.

"Back dogs!" suddenly cried the leader of the Sioux youths, in his own tongue. "White boy's club catch among the limbs. He shall have it to fight with."

Gopher Gid did not reply. The battle with the dogs had exhausted him. There was blood on his hands, his face; and his nether garments were hanging in threads upon his limbs. The brutality of his captors had almost extinguished his life. He could but look at the boy who stood before him, and point to the stick dangling over his head, and still griped by the spectral hand.

The young savage lifted his eyes, and stared aghast at the apparition.

"The Evil Spirit catch boy's stick! It reaches clear down from the sky! Look! look, my brothers!"

The remaining youths, full of curiosity, not unmixed with fear, came forward. Torches blazed for a moment about Gopher Gid, and then retreated suddenly, their holders uttering cries of terror.

But all did not immediately fly from the Evil Spirit. The leader sprung forward again, but did not glance at the hand. He now had no dogs to beat back; the animals were flying with their owners, glad to escape from the death-dealing club.

The Indian boy leaped to the foot of the tree.

"Wachetoc, the Bad Spirit, cannot set the white boy free," he said, showing the knife that glistened in his right hand. "He has fought well; he shall live, but he must go away."

Then the knife cut the cords that bound the boy's legs to the cottonwood, and as he tottered forward like a drunken man, the liberator, with a horrified glance at the ghostly hand overhead, snatched up his torch and ran away.

"I am free!" exclaimed Gopher Gid. "The hole in the hill shall see me yet. That devilish hand has saved me. Now if Midnight Jack and Rube were here! Hark! what was that?—the club has fallen down!"

"It is Tanglefoot's hand!" he suddenly cried.

Eager to set his doubts at rest, Gopher Gid stood on tiptoe, but could

scarcely touch the fingers. He then drew the carcasses of several of the dogs out of the fallen brutes to the spot, and mounted the pile with better success.

But the next moment a piercing cry welled from his throat, and starting back he slipped from the carcass to find himself hanging in mid-air, caught in the strongest of man-traps. His touch had quickened the hanging hand into life, and before he could withdraw his fingers he was in the power of the ghastly trap.

The fingers are getting cold. Is Tanglefoot really dead?

"I will end this!" he cried. "If I cannot pull my dead foe down, I will climb up to him. Who ever was caught by a dead man before?"

He swung himself against the tree, then he caught a limb with his only free hand and drew his body over it. But the other wrist was still griped by the deadly fingers!

The bloated but white face of Timon Moss was turned to the little trapper. His revolver was still stuck in his belt, and it was soon in Gopher Gid's hands. He leaned over the hand that grasped his wrist, and thrust the muzzle of the revolver against the lifeless pulse and touched the trigger. There came a flash, a dull report, and the boy jerked his hand loose!

"Goodbye, Tanglefoot, forever," he said, as he leaped to the ground. "Now I'll see the hill again. They are over there in the camp. And Midnight Jack's sister is yonder—that girl for whom Gopher Gid would risk his life if he has never seen her!"

A moment later the boy was gliding from the scene of his exciting adventures; but he ceased abruptly, for not twenty feet away an Indian was drinking from a spring that bubbled from the ground. Gopher Gid cocked the revolver in his hand, to see the savage leap to his feet and seize a repeating rifle.

"Setting Sun!" ejaculated the little trapper, and then he touched the trigger, but the hammer fell with a sharp click upon the empty cartridge.

"I'll try again," said Gopher—and then came the clear, ringing report of a rifle, which awoke the echoes of the romantic little valley.

Setting Sun's rifle was dashed from his grasp, and the chief sprung back with a tigerish cry of rage. In his right hand he held a knife, whose long blade glittered in the light of the moon.

It was Midnight Jack who had come thus timely upon the scene, and the Sioux chief recognised him and made a singular motion with his left hand, which caused a halt.

"By the gold of Ophir!" was the response. "You don't mean it?"

The sign was repeated, and Gopher Gid stood amazed to see the two men shaking hands on the spot where he hoped to have seen Setting Sun fall in the agonies of death.

The chief and Midnight Jack drew aside, and left Gopher alone, but he saw Setting Sun's hand point to the south-east, and heard him say—

"She will be found there; that road is the broadest to her."

Midnight Jack then approached the boy, and told him they had met a friend, and that he now knew the trail that would lead to his sister."

Armed with his favourite revolvers, which ingenuity had lately returned to him in the Sioux camp, he glided toward a rocky hill, and soon passed from Gopher Gid's vision. The sudden cracking of firearms roused his mettle, and snatching from his belt old Tanglefoot's pistol, which the road-agent had filled with loaded cartridges, our young white brave bounded forward to the assistance of his friend.

But Midnight Jack did not need help. He stood erect upon a boulder, pistol in each outstretched hand, fire in his eye, and below him the bodies of three Indians. Here Rube rode up, saying—

"We heard yer shots and hurried up. Yonder ar the hosses, but we hed a time. Thar war wolves around the corral, and Injuns, too."

Rube was surprised to see Gopher, but led the couple to three strong-limbed horses, whose rope halters were held by a young Indian.

The quartette were speedily mounted, Gopher Gid being seated behind Mouseskin, the Indian boy, who, for fear of being denounced as the slayer of Feel-the-Sky, had united his fortunes with those of our friends, and was leaving the Indian village—never to return? We shall see.

All at once a strange sound fell upon the ears of all.

"The horn!" exclaimed Rube. "There it goes again! Look! the red imp is goin' to run off. He's mad! crazy! bewitched! Catch 'im Mid—thar! he's gone!"

The Screamin' Eagle had spoken truly, for the young Sioux, with one sweep of his right arm had flung Gopher Gid to the ground, and dashed in the direction from which the bugle-blast had proceeded.

It was near the close of the day that followed the startling blast from Custer's bugle, when a handsome white man emerged from a cave in one of the deep canyons of Sioux land, and looked up at the dark high cliffs.

"Don't I know every foot of this old place," he murmured. "I've been here before. The girl's in the best quarters. She's a veritable tigress, but I'll make a lamb of her before I make her Mrs. Golden George."

With his mind on Dora, he began to climb the narrow stairway, with a cocked revolver in his hand. He thought alone of his antagonist of bygone days, and not of the man who, lying on the ground above, was waiting for his coming. The dark eyes that looked through a clump of bushes at the top of the fissure flashed with triumph, as they knew the man who was slowly ascending. It was Golden George, who saw his enemy and started back, while his revolver fell from his hand and rolled down the stony way. There was another at his head—behind it the devilish eye of Midnight Jack, who seeing the road-agent's pointed revolver, quick as a flash, he flung his arms up, knocked it aside, and threw his body back.

A terrible scene followed between the two deadly enemies. Struggling desperately with each other, they rolled together down the steep ravine, to the amazement of a brace of persons who suddedly appeared above.

But they soon disappeared from view, for they had grappled like bears, and had evidently rolled to the bottom. Rube and Gopher, somewhat surprised at the sudden disappearance of the two, ventured down the fissures, believing that the antagonists had swept around a bend.

They heard voices inside a stupendous wall a long way down the ravine.

"Are you ready, Golden George?"

"Ready, Midnight Jack."

For a moment Rube stared at the wall, or rock, with a natural hollow, like a man bereft of his senses.

"This is the devil's work, Gopher!" he gasped. "How did they get in thar? How? Why the rock opened and swallowed 'em, and they're goin' to fight to the death! Think what a fight it will be!"

The boy found himself dragged to the foot of the stony pathway by the excited hunter, and the next minute the two were ascending.

"Midnight Jack," said Golden George, who lay on the ground vanquished and dying, "this tussle has been to the death. Where are you?"

"Here," and the victor crept forward till he bent over his foe—till he clasped the hand of the dying man, who feebly said—

"Your sister is in the canyon. Follow the bed westward to the petrified trunk of a tree. The cave is there. I left her safe."

All was over.

"He found his own tomb and died in it," reflected Midnight Jack. "Goodbye, Golden George! We were bound to fight to the death!"

The road-agent now turned his attention to escape from the cavern, and all at once he heard a voice.

"This must be the hole, and Screamin' Eagle will drop into it."

Midnight Jack uttered a cry of delight, and then the friends met!

"Look to the north, Dora. Yonder is Sioux land. Would you go there?"

"Yes, to find the brother I have sought. Jack, if they had killed me—"

"I would not be here within sight of Fort Sully. What did I write on the wagon which I loaded with dead Indians?—that I would exterminate the Sioux nation! But you live, Dora. I thank Heaven I had not your death to avenge! Now farewell forever to the road!"

When Midnight Jack rode boldly into Fort Sully, he was at once put under arrest by the commandant. But a sweet face, and a sweeter voice, pleaded for his release, and Jack dared the colonel to point to one loyal citizen whom he had plundered. Then came the story of the father's curse—the exile—the stirring scenes we have witnessed in the course of this narrative, and—the release.

Time has rolled on. The soldier father is dead—Midnight Jack a prosperous man—and the little trapper's love been rewarded by Dora's hand.

Rube Rattler is back on the frontier, relating all about the sun-dance.

[THE END.]

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